

Task Force A Meeting Summary

Monday, April 17, 2006

Task Force Participants: Jim Byrum – Michigan Agri-Business Association, Bob Craig – MI Department of Agriculture, Keith Creagh – MI Department of Agriculture (chair), Michael DiRamio – Food System Economic Partnership, Mike Hamm – Michigan State University, Jim Herbert – Neogen Corporation, Mattie Jordan-Woods – Northside Association for Community Development, Bill Knudson – MSU Product Center, Art Loeffler – Star of the West, Terry Morrison – MI Food Processors Association, Dan Reeves – Associated Food Dealers of Michigan, Todd Regis – United Food and Commercial Workers 951.

Additional Participants: Susan Cocciarelli – Michigan State University, Kathy Fedder – MI Department of Agriculture, Alisande Henry – MI Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

The sixth Task Force A: Expanding Food-Related Businesses and Jobs meeting convened Monday, April 17, 2006 from 2:00pm – 3:30pm at Constitution Hall in Lansing. MDA Deputy Director Keith Creagh chaired the meeting and began the meeting with a welcome and a round of introductions.

In the March Task Force A meeting, participants began discussing Recommendation A4 relating to agri-food entrepreneurship and decided to develop the recommendation further in a sub-group that would meet before the April Task Force meeting. Task Force participants Mike Hamm, Bill Knudson and Alisande Henry met with staff to develop a draft that was circulated to all Task Force participants. Mr. Creagh began the April meeting by reviewing the draft version of Recommendation A4.

The Task Force Participants discussed the recommendation and the implementation strategies. Discussions revolved around how to ensure the entrepreneurship recommendation was inclusive of all agri-food businesses sizes and scopes while also recognizing the different challenges faced by each business. The participants also made some minor changes to the potential implementation strategies. MFPC staff will incorporate these changes and send the revised recommendation out to Task Force participants for approval. Recommendation A4 is:

Recommendation A4: Encourage entrepreneurs in agri-food businesses, and support the networks that help them to be successful.

- a) DLEG, MEDC and MDA should make existing entrepreneurial support services, networks and funding available and accessible to entrepreneurs in agri-food industries and be supportive of all sizes and scopes of operation.

- a) DLEG, MEDC and MDA should partner with organizations such as MSU's Product Center to establish them as a service hub for agri-food entrepreneurs, linking state agencies, universities and other service providers.

The Task Force moved on to the next topic for recommendation development: support for food processing businesses. Mr. Creagh began the discussion by updating the Task Force on how discussions between MDA, DEQ, food processors and other business interests are continuing and moving forward. Some participants pointed out that food processing is completely different than meat processing and that the topics should be dealt with in two separate recommendations. Task Force participants decided that a smaller workgroup should meet to further develop the recommendation with a focus on food (and not meat) processing. MFPC staff will convene a meeting of this workgroup in the next few weeks.

There was also discussion of developing a recommendation for establishing funding for new ventures and products since that is one of the greatest obstacles for new businesses. A sub-group will meet to discuss that as well.

The next Task Force A meeting will be held in June and will be scheduled shortly.